

Testimony Submitted by Nichelle Waddell to the Housing Committee
SB 291: “An Act Concerning Certain Protections for Group and Family Child Care Homes”
Connecticut General Assembly
March 10, 2022

Good morning Senator Lopes, Representative Williams, ranking members, and distinguished members of the Housing Committee:

My name is Nichelle Waddell and the name of my family’s program is Watch Me Grow Daycare. I have been a childcare owner for three years and an educator for 10 years. I am writing in support of SB 291 “An Act Concerning Certain Protections for Group and Family Child Care Homes”.

It is no secret that there is a childcare crisis in the United States. Countless news stories and articles in papers have highlighted the situation across the country, and the shortage of quality childcare is even more pronounced in Fairfield County and Westchester. Yet family and group childcare providers experience persistent housing and zoning barriers that prevent them from starting and maintaining their businesses. This bill will enforce and strengthen existing protections for home-based child care businesses. I’m here to talk about the challenges that I faced and encourage you to support this effort.

I applied for and was denied by my local zoning board of appeals twice before being approved to operate a group family child care home. I went from being a family child care home of 6 children to a group family childcare home which allows me to care for up to 12 children. Hiring a lawyer and paying the necessary fees was extremely costly. I am still paying off those costs. My approval was based on an agreement to shuttle children to and from the program.

Since being approved, the zoning board has prohibited me from shuttling infants. Under the current conditions outlined by the zoning board, I’ve had to turn away 5 families since January. And as recently as last month, I had to turn away a family with a three-month-old in dire need of care. I had to submit a request to the zoning board to adjust this condition and incurred more legal costs and zoning board fees.

These barriers have meant having to turn away the parents of young children, who are looking to return to work. Families have come to me before their children were born, looking for a high-quality program for their children. Many mothers have 3 to 6 months before they have to return to work. Family childcare educators often meet this need. Threats of eviction from landlords and unforeseen zoning challenges stop providers from being able to offer consistent care to families who are relying on us, to be able to get to work.

I've spoken with other educators that have been interested in expanding to group family childcare, and have decided against it due to the cost and uncertainty of participating in the zoning board process. Childcare is well regulated in the state and although the zoning board's mean well, they are stifling the supply of licensed family childcare in the state. This is why I am asking you to support SB 291.

Thank you for your time.

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